

by 1st Lt. Benjamin Silva



**Wilford Hall Medical Center's orthopedic spine surgery team** performs the Air Force's first total-disc arthroplasty procedure. During the five-hour procedure, surgeons removed and replaced a failed disc in the back of Tech. Sgt. Loren

Dick with a new three-piece medical device consisting of two metal endplates made of medical-grade cobalt chromium alloy and a sliding core made of medical-grade plastic. Sergeant Dick is an acquisition logistics manager from Scott Air Force Base, Ill.

## Doctors perform alternative back surgery

LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas — Doctors at Wilford Hall Medical Center made history in March by performing a total-disc arthroplasty procedure — the first of its kind to be performed at any Air Force medical center.

Maj. (Dr.) **Steven Cyr**, chief of orthopedic spine surgery, successfully removed and replaced a spinal disc from Tech. Sgt. **Loren Dick**, an acquisition logistics manager from Scott Air Force Base, Ill.

Developed in Europe nearly 17 years ago, the procedure underwent a two-year clinical trial in America and received approval in October from the Food and Drug Administration.

"Typically, a patient with lower-back pain is first treated with nonoperative conservative measures," Dr. Cyr said. "For people who [do not improve with] those treatments, their only alternative would be operative care. The standard has always been spinal fusions."

The new alternative procedure appears to be the most promising because it can provide patients with continued motion of that region, instead of fusing their vertebrae. Airmen who undergo spine fusion are limited in activity and normally do not return to functional duty for at least three months. They're not allowed to drive and are usually placed in a back brace

to aid in the bone-fusion process.

"Hopefully, not only do we help our Airmen get better, but we're also possibly preventing future surgery for them as well by giving them continued motion at that level," Dr. Cyr said. "This is a great thing for the Air Force and our Airmen. We have several Airmen who are eager and want to get back to work, and if we can assist them in restoring their back health and getting them back on track, I'm all for it."

Anyone interested in having the procedure done should see a primary care manager for a referral.

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